

David and Bathsheba * 2 Samuel 11 & 12

November 20, 2019 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I have this very vivid memory from first year university – I was walking down the hallway of the dorm where I lived and I was wrestling in my head with something I had done. I had done wrong. I had sinned. To be honest, I don't remember now what it was, but I had put my will before God's and I felt awful.

But in my mind, I was trying to overcome it. I was trying to justify my actions. I was trying to redefine morality so that I wasn't really guilty. I was trying to convince myself that what I had done it wasn't such a big deal.

Why then did it feel so wrong?

Have you ever found yourself in that situation? You've put your own will before God's and then tried to mentally talk your way out of it?

Unless you're Donald Trump, who says he never makes mistakes that need forgiveness, you've been in that place. We've all been there. We have all put our own interests before God's at various points in our lives and that's sin. I think that you're self-aware enough to recognize that.

So the question is – what do we do with it? What do we do when we sin? What do we do when we go beyond what God has said is good and helpful and we know in our heart of hearts that what we did was wrong?

The passage that we are looking at today helps us to get at the heart of that question. I mean, this is really one of the quintessential passages on sin and repentance in the whole of the Bible and boy does it teach us a lot. So let's get right into it, and we'll start at the top, in 2 Samuel 11 – 2 Samuel 11, verse 1.

1 In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem (2Sa 11:1 NIV).

So right off the bat, we've got two details that are very important to the story. First, the Israelite army is off battling the Ammonites at Rabbah, a stronghold about 40 miles NE of Jerusalem. So the army is over there. Second, it's the spring, the time of year when kings go off to war, and King David is at home in his sweat pants, bumming around in Jerusalem. Houston, we have a problem.

So, you probably know the story: David is up on his palace rooftop one night and he's checking out the view of the city, and then, wouldn't you know it, his eyes land upon this beautiful young lady bathing on the rooftop. David says 'hubba hubba – gotta have her' – and so he takes her and he sleeps with her. And then he sends her home. 'One night stand' David thinks. 'No big deal. I'm the king; I can do whatever I want.'

Well, that's all fine and good; David goes on with his life until he gets a two word text message from Bathsheba. It says: 'I'm pregnant.' Two words that will make or break a man.

How do you think David will respond? He knows that God has expressly forbidden adultery – what do you think he’s going to do about this sin? Admit that he did wrong, or take a page from the last impeachable president, saying ‘I did not have sexual relations with that woman.’

He takes the second option. And he concocts a plan to cover up his sin.

He sends messengers off to his army at Rabbah (where he *should* be) to get Bathsheba’s husband Uriah home so that everyone will think that the baby is his. Uriah heads home to meet with David and report on the progress of the battle and David says ‘oh that’s great. That’s so great. So, anyways, why don’t you head home to your beautiful wife and just relax for a while. (Literally, he says ‘go wash your feet’ – that’s the ANE equivalent ‘why don’t you go home; Netflix and chill’) – why don’t you head home, take a load off, you deserve it.

Well, Uriah heads home but he doesn’t go in. In fact, he spends the night sleeping in the door way of David’s palace. When David finds out, he calls him in and says ‘dude, you’re on R&R? What are you doing?’ and Uriah responds "The ark and Israel are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (2Sa 11:11 NIV).

Uriah is a remarkable contrast to David. He’s faithful. He’s loyal. He’s committed to Israel and he puts his duty before pleasure. And here’s the faithfulness king is Israel trying to cover up HIS pleasure.

So David says – ‘ok, stay one more night’ – and then he gets him good and drunk but even then, Uriah is a man of principle. He chooses solidarity with his brothers in the field, over temporal pleasure and he chooses again to sleep at the palace.

Well, now David’s in a pickle because he wants it to look like Uriah’s the father, but Uriah’s not playing along. Uriah has more integrity than HE does. So David has a choice – own up to his sin or choose a different path. He chooses a different path.

He sends faithful Uriah back to battle, faithfully carrying a message back to his captain, commanding him to orchestrate Uriah’s death. He’s carrying his own warrant. And Joab looks at the plan – David says – put Uriah up in the front lines and then have everybody pull back and then he’ll die – and Joab says ‘that’s a terrible plan! Everyone will know that something’s up.’ And so, apparently complicit with David, Joab gives a whole bunch of men a suicide mission, and so they all die so that no one will suspect anything fishy when it comes to Uriah’s death.

This is an utter tragedy. David sinned against Bathsheba; David sinned against Uriah; he now has the blood of several men – faithful men - on his hands. When you look at other accounts of David’s army, you see he had this unique corps of ‘mighty men’ (2 Samuel 23:24-39) – heroes of legend, sworn to protect David and to give his life for David – Uriah’s one of them – and David’s just put him to death.

24 Among the Thirty were: Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem... 39 and Uriah the Hittite (2Sa 23:24-39 NIV).

Well, Joab sends a messenger back to deliver the news – he gives this perfunctory report of the battle and then gets to the part David REALLY cares about – ‘oh, by the way, Uriah’s dead.’

And David says – ‘well, that happens in battle, no point getting worked up about it; live by the sword, die by the sword. Just get back out there and keep up the good work.’

Do you see how callous this charade has made David? He keeps covering up his sin and every time, he becomes more cruel and more heartless. He’s committing more and more to this sin and rotting because of it.

And Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband, and then David took her in as another of his wives and the baby then would be ‘legitimate.’

But look at verse 27. As I was telling the story, I kept looking back to the actual text to see – is the narrator calling this a sin? It clearly is – and yet he offers no real moral judgment – he’s just saying ‘these are the things that David did.’ And maybe he’s reflecting David’s point of view – in the midst of it, he’s thinking ‘I can do whatever I want – I decide what’s right and wrong – and yet here in verse 27 – the narrator tells it like it is. He’s just been saving it up. V. 27 –

The thing that David had done displeased the LORD. You don’t need any more than that. There’s no getting around it; no massaging the details. David did wrong in God’s eyes and that’s that. God will hold him accountable.

Well, now in chapter 12, God sends Nathan in to David to confront him about his sin. You remember Nathan – he was the prophet that David kept on hand to remind him of God – well, now YHWH sends him in to David to point out that this adulterous, murderous king has actually done wrong. Nathan is a brave man. And a smart man too. Because he goes in – not guns blazing, not Bible thumping – he goes in with a story.

“David,” he said. “There were two men in a small town. One was very rich, one was very poor. The rich man had all sorts of livestock, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He loved this lamb; he raised it, it grew up with him and his children. It drank from his cup and ate from his plate and even slept in his arms. This beautiful little lamb was like a daughter to him.

But then one day a traveler came to town, to meet the rich man, but the rich man didn’t want to give up HIS livestock, so he stole the man’s precious lamb and slaughtered it and gave it to the traveller, callously indifferent to the poor man’s broken heart.”

Caught up in the story and in the injustice of it all, David cries out – “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb, four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity!” David burns with anger against this hypothetical sin, this hypothetical man.

And Nathan says “David – You are that man.”

And what’s more – let me tell you what the LORD says –

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.

8 I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. [I gave you everything!] And if all this had [been too little, I would have given you even more.

9 Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

How could you, David?

10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' (2Sa 12:10 NIV).

How do you think he's going to respond? Faced with his sin, is he going to talk his way out of it? Is he going to move the goal posts and say 'that wasn't really sin after all?' Is he going to say 'cut me some slack; don't you know there's worse sinners than me'?

Verse 13 - 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." (2Sa 12:13 NIV).

He confesses his sin. He admits that he was wrong. He doesn't try to justify himself like Saul did; he just straight up admits – "I have sinned against the LORD."

And while he doesn't say much here, I think his words in Psalm 51 say it all. David wrote psalm 51 in light of this very encounter and he prays –

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

I think that all of that is tucked into those six words – "I have sinned against the LORD." David addresses the sin head on and admits that he has transgressed God's boundaries.

Well that's all well and good, but what do you think God's going to do? I mean, David's slept with another man's wife; he's got her pregnant; he's woven a net of deception, involving dozens of people including staff and soldiers; he's murdered one innocent man Uriah and gotten another whole squad of troops killed in his wake. Can God forgive a sinner like this? What do you think?

Again, verse 13 - Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die" (2Sa 12:13 NIV).

In light of David's repentance, God has met awful sin with awesome grace.

What David did was absolutely despicable – it's terrible - there's no getting around that. John Calvin once wrote that this story "~~Now here is a story that~~ should make our hair stand straight up on end whenever we think of it—that a servant of God as excellent as David should fall into such a serious and enormous sin that he... [would] thus put himself in the class of monster!" (Calvin). This is David we're talking about. David! The man after God's own heart, the beloved king of God's beloved people, the recipient of God's promise of an eternal kingdom – his sin here is absolutely awful.

And yet God met that awful sin with awesome grace. And realize here – I’m using the word ‘awesome’ as it used to be used – not like – ‘whoa, awesome bro’ – but like awe-some – awe inspiring – the sort of thing that goes beyond belief, beyond expectation, makes you stand back, mouth agape, in awe. God showed awe-inspiring grace to David – as great as his sin was, God’s willingness to forgive was even greater.

When David confessed his sin, God was gracious to forgive.
When David admitted that he had done wrong, God forgave him.

And that’s a message that we need to hear too. When we confess OUR sin, God is gracious to forgive. None of us have sinned quite like David but we have all done wrong in God’s eyes. I know that that might be hard to believe in the 21st century – we like to think that WE define right and wrong for ourselves – but if you’ve ever put your own will before God’s, then you are that man. Or you are that woman. We all are.

And remember how worked up David got about the hypothetical rich man in Nathan’s story – verse 5 says he burned with anger – he was enraged by this man’s violation of justice; just imagine how God feels when we, His beloved Creation, reject Him.

But, God loves us so much, He is SO committed to mercy that He came in the person of His Son Jesus to die in our place. He received what the rich man deserved – what I deserved – so that I could be forgiven. So that you could be forgiven.

So let me ask. What are you doing with that offer of forgiveness?

Maybe you’ve never thought about it before; never considering that you might be guilty before the God of the universe. I want to encourage you to think carefully about David’s story here and your own story – and I want to invite you to confess your sin, knowing that God meets awful sin with awesome grace.

In a sense, I’m talking to my first year university self here – and I would say to him and I would say to you – stop trying to do mental gymnastics to make sin ‘not sin.’ Stop trying to pretend that nothing’s wrong. Stop slogging along with the burden of sin weighing heavy on your soul. Come to the Lord, confess your sin, and let Him lift that burden from your shoulders.

If you’ve wanted that, but have never asked – maybe you’ve thought ‘well, what I did was so wrong, that God can’t forgive me.’ Well, look – did you sleep with someone, murder their partner and merc a bunch of soldiers to cover it up? God forgave David; he forgave you. You can borrow David’s own words from Psalm 51 - 1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Help me to live for you!

And if you’ve already done that; you’ve confessed your sin and been made new by the Spirit of God; that’s great, but you’ll still probably sin from time and time.

I mean, John writes to believers in 1 John 1 and says - 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. The more I grow in relationship with Christ - the more my mind is shaped by His word - the more I realize how far short of His perfection I fall. If you don’t see that in

yourself, could it be that your standards reflect the world's, more than God's? Your definition of sin is more informed by the world than the word? We all sin; we all need grace.

So when you sin as a believer, what do you do? When God gracious sends a Nathan – a person or your conscience to say 'that wasn't right' – what do you do? Well, look at the very next verse – 1 John 1:9 John writes -

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

That's David writ large. That's the forgiveness that He offers to you and to me.

When we confess OUR sin, God is gracious to forgive.

Now that's the big idea for this message – the big one I want you to act on – but let me quickly point out two more implications.

First – forgiveness doesn't erase consequences. 'Forgiven sins still sting' (James Adams, TGC sermon, March 24, 2009). When we perpetrate injustice, it can come back on us. We reap what we sow. And David certainly experienced that. He tried to fix things with the sword and then in his confrontation with David, Nathan said – because of what you've done, the sword will not depart from your house. And he was right - the rest of David's story is rife with turmoil and conflict. David's children would squabble and even kill one another and David lost his throne to his firstborn for awhile, until he was murdered and David got it back. There were consequences for David, clearly linked to what he had done. And that's the same for us. God is merciful and He will forgive, but we do reap what we sow. Thankfully though, we can rely on Him, even as we deal with those consequences.

Second – Why not just skip all the drama and flee temptation in the first place? David saw Bathsheba – the seed of temptation formed in his mind – he could have simply said 'no, that's not right' and plucked out the seed; instead, he let himself lust over Bathsheba and he let himself ignore God's word and before he knew it, that seed had grown into an out-of-control killer weed. I like what Charles Stanley says about this –

"All temptation begins with a single thought. We have the ability to choose to ignore it or to allow it to remain in our minds. If it remains, more than likely it will gain a foothold within us... Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have the ability to screen, select, admit, and cultivate what goes into our minds. By His power, we can prevent our minds from taking a wrong turn and wandering into evil, but we must choose to focus on what is godly and good" (Phil. 4:8) (Stanley Life Principles Bible notes).

So flee temptation in the first place – and also – I do need to point out – avoid places where you might be tempted. Get fixed on what you need to be doing so that your mind and body don't go wandering where they shouldn't. I mean, how does this passage open? It was the time when kings go out to war – and the king of Israel was a home, peeping on ladies. If he'd a been where he should have been, this never would have happened in the first place. Avoid temptation if you can, and flee from it if it appears.

And realize that if you fall, it's not the end of the world. God IS gracious – God meets awful sin with awe-some grace – don't just carry that guilt around with you, don't pretend like it's not there – go to

God – confess and let Him cleanse you of all unrighteousness. And let the awe-some grace of God move you to faithful living.

As we close, I want to leave with you a quotation from Eugene Peterson – he’s the pastor who wrote the Message translation of the Bible. Thinking about David and Bathsheba he writes -

“David’s sin, enormous as it was, was wildly outdone by God’s grace. David’s sin cannot, must not be minimized, but it’s miniscule compared to God’s salvation from it. It’s always a mistake to concentrate attention on our sins; it’s God’s work on our sins that’s the main event” (Eugene Peterson, *Leap over a wall*, 189).

Let’s cherish forgiveness and live with faithfulness.

BENEDICTION

15. 1 Th. 3:12-13 - May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.